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**Sent:** Friday, November 19, 2010 2:06 PM  
**To:** [mary.woollen@blueribboncommission.net](mailto:mary.woollen@blueribboncommission.net)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Blue Ribbon Commission Testimony - Nov. 16, 2010

Dear Mary,

It was a pleasure to meet you at the BRC meeting earlier this week. Thank you for the work that you and the commission are doing.

As we discussed, here (below) is a written version of my public comments for the Commission. I hope this is helpful and of some interest, and of course I would be happy to answer any questions or offer further comments at the Commission's request.

Best of luck going forward, and I will watch the Commission's future work with utmost interest.

Best Regards,  
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Comments for the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future

Jay Marx  
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November 16, 2010

The best indicator of the US government's attitude toward our nuclear future is the charge and purview of this Blue Ribbon Commission. By restricting this comprehensive review of our nuclear policy to only the "back end" of the fuel cycle, the President and Secretary of Energy have ensured that the most important questions about our nuclear future do not get asked, let alone answered. After all, by the time we wrestle with the questions of, "What do we DO with the nuclear waste we're generating?" we have already accepted that we must generate ever more waste, toxic and radioactive for tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or indeed billions of years. Uranium 238 has a half-life of 4.5 billion years--roughly the age of our planet itself.

How dare we? For our own selfish purposes, when there are other clear, viable options available to us, as we know there are, where do we get off insisting to future generations that we must leave them this poisonous legacy, whose security we can never guarantee, and whose toxic legacy will last, for all practical purposes, forever?

Of course this is not to fault this commission for fulfilling its charge. Your work here cannot be

easy, figuring out how to clean up and contain an essentially infinite mess. Thank you for your time and service, and more, for actually engaging the public as you are doing--something that happens all too infrequently in our democracy, especially with regard to all things nuclear. It is not your fault you have been asked to answer the wrong questions.

I know you will report to the Secretary of Energy, who will ultimately report to the President, and perhaps eventually your conclusions will sift out to Congress and to the people beyond. I hope you don't mind our taking this opportunity to "speak up the ladder" and ask some of the questions that, by rights, should be asked before the nuclear horse is out of the barn, or the waste out of the barrel, or the missile out of the silo.

I reference nuclear weapons because, of course, our modern nuclear energy program only exists because of our nuclear weapons programs (and, some would say, to help continue to justify those programs). Further, we must acknowledge that as long as we are making nuclear power, we are continuously creating more nuclear proliferation risk. Plutonium does not exist in nature (anymore). It cannot be mined, except from the waste that uranium fission inevitably creates. From an Administration that is apparently working so hard to prevent nuclear proliferation everywhere else on the planet, it seems to say the least incongruous that we would pursue an energy policy for ourselves that entails a perpetual proliferation risk--no matter how we sugar-coat, minimize, or - more ideally - vitrify that risk. (Plutonium: put it under glass.)

Why is the US government insisting on supporting this dangerous industry? **Who really benefits** from nuclear power, other than plant manufacturers and utility operators, uranium speculators (miners, millers, enrichers) and security contractors, so often large corporations who already profit so much from this heavily taxpayer subsidized industry? (Even Wall Street eschews nuclear investment as too risky without government guarantees!) Certainly not the public, the people who are put at risk in perpetuity. Certainly not the utility customers in places like Florida, where they are right now paying a surcharge on their electric bills for hypothetical future nuclear power, in a state doing just fine without it. Florida, where there shines so much sun that they could be exporting solar power to neighbors!

Finally, a word about cost-benefit analyses and opportunity costs. I hope the commission really hears and acts on Mr. Kraft's comment earlier, that an honest "cradle to grave" analysis of the back end of the nuclear cycle should ask, "What does waste containment really cost us?" How many billions? And what else might we have done with such money?

For a billion dollars, we can generate about 300 megawatts of power from the wind, possibly more, from solar a little less. But how much nuclear power does one billion dollars buy? None. A billion dollars cannot build a nuclear reactor. How much do reactors cost? Three to five billion dollars, for perhaps 1000 megawatts. We can generate 1 or 2 gigawatts of solar or wind power for the same price--clean, renewable, sustainable energy--and much sooner too. From design to approval to construction to start up, nuclear reactors take 10 years to build, or more. Wind and solar farms can be up and running in two years, or even less. And this is to say nothing of the omnipresent operating risks and ever-enduring waste that nuclear power guarantees.

The bottom line is that large-scale public investment in nuclear power is unwise economics, perpetually dangerous, and without common sense. Listening closely and fairly to the testimony

of Kevin Kamps and Susan Corbett, the two grassroots experts invited to speak today on behalf of the public interest, this commission must draw the same conclusions that so many millions of people around the country, and planet, have already reached: the most effective, safe and cost-efficient way to handle nuclear waste, by far, is not to create it at all.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these remarks.